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The Spirit of the Lord
hath filled the whole world
Alleluia

POPE PIUS XII: TO ARTISTS

The address of Pope Pius XII on the occasion of the Exhibition of Paintings of Fra Angelico is of special concern to members of the Catholic Art Association. In this excerpt the Holy Father describes the picture language of Fra Angelico and points out the sublime possibilities of an art which is truly universal.

What is substantially the aim of the picture language which Fra Angelico addresses to the children of his own and succeeding centuries? On the one hand, his purpose is to teach the truths of faith, convincing men's minds by the very force of their beauty. On the other, he aims to draw the faithful to the practice of the Christian virtues by setting before them beautiful and attractive examples. Because of this second purpose, his work becomes a perennial message of living Christianity, and, in a certain sense a sublimely human message based on the principle of the transhumanizing force of religion, by virtue of which everyone who comes in direct contact with God and his mysteries becomes like him in holiness, in beauty and in bliss; becomes, that is, a creature according to the original design of his Creator. . . .

It is true that an explicit religious or ethical function is not demanded of art as art. If, as the aesthetic expression of the human spirit, it reflects that spirit in its complete verity or at least does not positively distort it, art is in itself sacred and religious, that is, in so far as it is the interpreter of a work of God. But if its content and aim are such as Fra Angelico gave his painting, then art rises to the dignity almost of a minister of God, reflecting a greater number of perfections.

We should like to point out to artists, who are ever dear to Us, this sublime possibility of art. For if instead the words and cadences of artistic expression were fitted to minds which are false, empty and confused, that is, unlike the Creator's plan, if, instead of lifting the mind and heart to noble sentiments, art excited the baser passions, it would indeed encounter some response and welcome, if only because of its novelty, which is not always a virtue, and because of the slim fraction of reality reflected in all human expression. But such art would be a degradation of itself; it would be a negation of its primary and essential character. Nor would it be universal and eternal, like the human spirit to which it speaks.

MUSIC IN TRADITION

Reminding us of the position of cardinal social importance to which thoughtful minds of the past have assigned musical education, Miss Thurston briefly traces the history of religious music and suggests two important helps to a better understanding of it. This paper was originally presented during the National Convention of the C.A.A. in August, 1955, at the College of St. Rose, Albany.

By Ethel Thurston

MUSIC in the past has had an almost unbelievably deep and beautiful influence on the spiritual and mental development of individuals. Here are a few quotations from great thinkers of western tradition. The first three are from Plato:

Education in music is most sovereign, because more than anything else, rhythm and harmonia find their way to the innermost soul, and take strongest hold upon it, bringing with them and imparting grace . . . Omissions and failure of beauty in things badly made or grown would be most quickly perceived by one who was properly educated in music, and so feeling distaste rightly, he would praise beautiful things and take delight in them . . . The ugly he would rightly disapprove and hate while still young and yet unable to apprehend the reason; but when reason came, the man thus nurtured would be the first to give her welcome, for by this affinity he would know her . . . Such is the cause of education in music.

Republic I, 12, Loeb Translation

Plato here does not speak of sentiment, of emotion, or of being swept away on wings of song. He states that the right education in music helps not just a few, but all those so educated to love reason. Yet how many of us today who love reason could say that they have been much helped to do so by music? This quotation alone raises a tremendous problem *for us*,

as we are almost totally without one of the traditional means which throughout the ages have sustained the mind with a combination of pleasure and order in such a way as to help it to love reason.

"When there is a coincidence of a beautiful disposition in the soul and corresponding harmonious beauties in the bodily form — is this not the fairest spectacle for one who is capable of its contemplation?" "Far the fairest." "And surely the fairest is the most loveable?" "Of course." "The true musician then would love by preference persons of this sort; but if there were disharmony he would not love this." "No," he said, "not if there were a defect in the soul; but if it were in the body he would bear with it and still be willing to bestow his love."

Republic I, 12. The Platonic Socrates is addressing Glaucon.

According to these profound sentences of two thousand years ago, a person educated in music has built a noble pattern in his mind against which he instinctively measures the things in life. In the first passage, this pattern disposes him to prefer reason to unreason: in the second, a friend with beauty of character to one without. (By "true musician" Plato does not mean a professional musician, but the ordinary free man given the ideal education.)

A third quotation:

When we learned our letters and felt that we knew them sufficiently . . . we were eager to distinguish them everywhere . . . Is it not also true that if there are any likenesses of letters reflected in water or mirrors, we shall never know them until we know the originals? Then . . . we shall never be true musicians either, until

we are able to recognize the forms of soberness, courage, liberality, and high-mindedness, and all their kindred and opposites too, in all the (musical) combinations that contain and convey them and their images wherever found, disregarding them neither in trifles nor in great things.

Republic I, 12.

Plato explains here that it is not possible to recognize letters of the alphabet reflected in a mirror until we first know them in the original. The recognition of the virtues of soberness, courage, liberality, and high-mindedness can be compared to recognition of letters in the original. The discernment of these virtues conveyed in music can be compared with the discernment of letters reflected in a mirror. We shall never be "true musicians" until we can recognize all the virtues in all the musical combinations that contain them. This was difficult in 400 B.C., and is even more difficult today, but the ancient and medieval thinkers have given us means by which we can begin to achieve it.

When Christianity came, there already existed a highly civilized and idealistic art sprung from a noble philosophy. This art found its normal place in the Christian philosophy and practice, and the Church Fathers say very much the same kinds of things that Plato said. Here is St. Basil:

For when the Holy Spirit saw that mankind was ill-inclined towards virtue, and that we were heedless of the righteous life because of our inclination to pleasure, what did He do? He blended the delight of melody with doctrines in order that through the pleasantness and softness of the sound we might unawares receive what was useful in the words, according to the practice of wise physicians, who, when they give the more bitter draughts to the sick, often smear the rim of the cup with honey . . .

A psalm (sung) is the tranquillity of souls, the arbitrator of peace, restraining the disorder and turbulence of thoughts, for it softens the passion of the soul and moderates its unruliness. A psalm forms friendships, unites the divided . . .

furnishes arms against nightly terrors, gives respite from daily toil . . . A psalm is the voice of the Church. It gladdens feast days, it creates the grief which is in accord with God's will, for a psalm brings a tear even from a heart of stone . . . A psalm is the ordinance of Heaven . . . whereby doctrines are somehow more deeply impressed upon the mind. Can we not learn the splendor of courage, the exactness of justice, the dignity of self-control . . . the measure of patience, whatsoever good things that you may name?

Homily on the First Psalm, I.
Translation by Oliver Strunk

An anonymous writer:

Music sustains the mind that it may understand the meaning of the scriptures and lift(s) the mind to the contemplation of that which is above it — that which is heavenly and divine.

Instituto Patrum de modo psallendi I, 353.

St. Isidore of Seville:

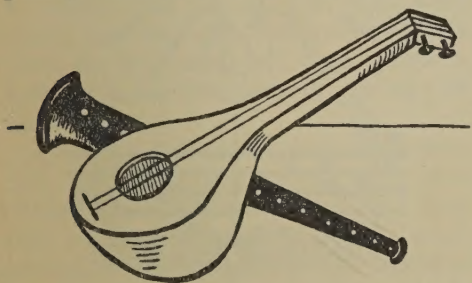
Thus without music, no discipline can be perfect.

De musica III, ed. Gerbert.

In these quotations, we find that music was expected to incline us to love reason, to form friendship, to learn the splendor of the virtues. Besides teaching love of reason, it now was written to dispose the mind to contemplation. Besides inclining one towards friendship, it conveyed the voice of the Mystical Body. It did not do these things by accident. The actual notes, the spaces between the notes, the recurring tunes, the rhythm, now regular, now irregular, and the pauses — all were carefully thought out and shaped according to tradition which lasted for centuries, and which stemmed from pre-Christian times. As St. Basil says, music must give just enough pleasure — enough to raise a person from emptymindedness or boredom, enough to stimulate pleasure in and love of thought: but not too much so that emotion takes the place of thought, or too intricate so that the mind concentrates on the interesting combinations of sound instead of on the meaning. It must perfect

the operation, but not overwhelm the operation.

The immense achievement of Gregorian Chant in the *Liber Usualis* has been written according to this discipline by composers who had the gift, knowledge, and skill to do so. We have inherited an heirloom, though compact in this book, with as many skillful turns as the palace of the Alhambra or the basilica of St. Sophia. However the workmanship is over a thousand years old, and is of a quality completely unfamiliar to us. If we are to



have the benefits of which St. Basil speaks, to learn from it to love reason and to see the splendor of the virtues, we must understand it better than we do, and become more familiar with it.

We have the music, but we do not fully hear it. This is the problem.

It would be well to consider, at this point, the history of religious music. In the Mediterranean region, Christianity entered fully formed, mature civilizations having fully developed Jewish and pagan music. Complex and obscure changes took place, but we cannot follow them as there are very few surviving manuscripts. But at the end of five hundred years we have some of the most perfect examples of Gregorian, Ambrosian, and other chants, as well as explanations, as in St. Basil's homily, of what these chants meant to those who used them.

From the mature civilizations in the Mediterranean, Christianity was brought to the barbarians in the north of Europe. Here the Church was in danger of being swamped by the barbarism with which

she was surrounded and of becoming barbarian too. This danger was overcome by the monastic orders which were like little states within the state, which served as models for the rest of Christian society. They preserved their power to resist the environment, their spiritual independence, their otherworldliness, and they also preserved much of the Greco-Roman culture, both pagan and Christian. Singing teachers were sent from Rome to teach Gregorian chant in these monasteries. The monasteries, both within and without the limits of the old Roman Empire, added new chants to the liturgy throughout these centuries.

The Church then had to survive a period of assimilation during these Middle Ages. The ideals of the Church and those of the secular rulers and warriors were not the same. The warriors were bloodthirsty and disliked the ethics of the monks. The monks disliked the ethics of the warriors. At the end of these ages, when the new vernacular literature appeared, these two began to fuse. The warriors described in the *Chansons de Gestes* were conscious of Christian heroism and higher loyalties. This is from the *Chanson de Rolanz*.

The Count Rolanz has never loved
cowards,

Nor arrogant, nor men of evil heart,
Nor chevalier that was not good vassal.
That Archbishop, Turpins, he calls apart:
'Sir, you're afoot and I my charger have;
For love of you, here will I take my

stand,

Together we'll endure things good and
bad.

The troubadour cult of love and courtesy was neither barbarian nor Christian, but had its roots in the Moslem spiritual tradition. It was anti-Christian, amoral, and very sophisticated. It flourished in the Albigensian parts of France. But the troubadours did not secularize medieval culture. Medieval religion eventually assimilated troubadour poetry and spiritualized it. St. Francis of Assisi called his

order a spiritual knighthood. His monks were the jongleurs of God in service of the Cross, for love of Lady Poverty. They did deeds of spiritual prowess. This fusion of chivalry and Christianity produced great works including the Arthurian Romances, and culminated in the work of Dante. This was the last great age of Gregorian Chant as well as an age of highly developed polyphony and secular music.

Thus far in her history, in four different ages, and in four different ways, the Church succeeded in Christianizing a secular culture. And each time the culture gained spiritually and artistically. In the Middle Ages religion and culture were in a state of communion; the highest expressions of culture were religious, and the greatest representatives of religion were leaders of culture.

Let us now see how the separation of religion and art took place. According to Father Joseph Jungmann, the people took part in the responses and in parts of the ordinary of the Mass until about the middle of the 11th century. Popular participation fell into oblivion when the vernacular languages had become different enough from the Latin so that the congregation could no longer understand the Mass. So a small *schola* or group of professionals took over not only the Proper, but also the functions that originally belonged to the people, and Gregorian chants began to be written that were so ornate that only this professional *schola* could sing them. As an example, the Offertory, *Iustus ut palma*¹ has elaborate turns of melody on every syllable that most ordinary congregations could not sing. And if a group of over one hundred sang them, they would not sound clear. But the *Ambrosian Gloria*,² an early work, is easy and could be sung by two people, ten people, or a thousand people.

Polyphony, the art of music in more

than one voice, began seriously to rival Gregorian chant. Polyphony involves a marvelous study of one sound in relation to another. It absorbed more and more of the best writers, and was highly honored and highly paid. Gregorian chant was not so honored or paid. It was difficult, especially at first, to adjust the music both to the inner laws of counterpoint and to the relation of music, ideas, and words,



so it was ideas and words that received only perfunctory attention. By 1450, in the works of Dufay, one can find a *Kyrie* or an *eleison* placed anywhere in the manuscript; it hardly matters as the music follows its own laws. Following a revolution against medieval culture, art, and music, from 1450-1800 Gregorian chant remained unappreciated, being sung with distorted rhythm. Good chants were no longer written. In polyphony, although one can meditate on the text while singing, the music has a tendency to distract attention to interesting or beautiful combinations of sound. The balance called for by St. Basil is no longer there. (It is to be noted that this criticism applies not only to the music of the liturgy, but to other sacred music, and even to some secular music — that in which the intention is to portray the thought, such as some operas, or cantatas, or even some songs, though not all secular music, such as dance music. Not only St. Basil and his contemporaries, but Plato also said: "The harmonia (melody) and rhythm

¹*Liber usualis* p. 1193.

²*Liber usualis* p. 88.

must follow the words."³

After the Middle Ages, there are more and more composers, such as Monteverdi, whose secular works are more interesting and colorful than their sacred. By 1760 this is true of most composers. (Mozart's Mass does not compare with his *Don Giovanni*.) Sacred music followed the coldly brilliant patterns of secular music. Haydn succeeded in adapting this style to a beautiful sacred work, "The Creation." He did this by a *tour de force*, thinking and hearing years ahead of his time, after an austere and faithful life. But sacred music, even when interesting, was suitable primarily for concert and home performance, not for performance during the Mass.

It was the 19th century romantic writers who made the genuine discovery that medieval culture was spiritual and hieratic, and had moving capacity to reach human nature — such as the medieval legends of Dante. It was then that people finally *heard* that later music was not fully united to the liturgy, but that the older music was. Christopher Dawson considers that the 19th century rediscovery of the Middle Ages is of no less importance in the history of European thought, than the rediscovery of Hellenism by the Humanists.

We now have the chant restored, the *Liber Usualis*, and the *Motu Proprio*. We have the notes of a music which contain everything that could be wanted in the way of ethos. We can sing them correctly. We understand with our *minds* that these most beautifully adorn the sacred texts. We have the desire to sing them. What most of us now need is the ability *to live with them happily* and to understand them. We need a sympathy and understanding of the *sounds*, because until we have that, they cannot teach us anything of the splendor of virtues or of the voice of the mystical body. We need to be able to do as Plato said. "When reason comes,

the man nurtured by music is the first to give her welcome, for by this affinity he knows her."

There are two important helps for the understanding of the sounds which are available and have been used in schools—the first is music literature, the second, solfeggio. Many European schools in both ancient and recent times have taught these, not only to a few, but to all the children.

With regard to general knowledge of literature, some people may ask, "Why, if we lost our sense of balance through inordinate love of the musical intricacies of 1450-1850 — why in regaining it, must we go back and study all this music over again?" For the same reason that the Benedictines preserved the poetry of Virgil and Horace. It represents the civilization that we have inherited.

There are many schools and choirs which have devoted their time to Gregorian chant alone, or to chant and polyphony alone. During the restoration of more suitable music, it was necessary that choir masters make a complete break with such works as Bizet's *Agnus Dei*, devoting all their time to the best, and requiring the same of their choir members and students. During the Renaissance, the problem was one of inordinate love of secular music, but now, especially in this country, the problem is that of unfamiliarity with, and consequently lack of love of *any* music. Now that the chant is established, we must understand it in a way that is deep and mature. It is rare that a person acquires a mature or sensitive conception of old music other than through and with a more familiar kind of music. It does sometimes happen, but it is not the usual thing. It is very rare that a person can understand the modes, or that he can follow the lines without feeling a lack of chords, can tell a great chant from a more perfunctory one, who is not familiar with the music of the last two centuries. The ear does not fully

³Republic I, 10.

grasp the ancient scales until it knows the more familiar scale.

In our rightful enthusiasm for the ethos of the older music, we must not overlook the fact that during the last five hundred years, the idea of ethos in music has never been fully lost. Music by its nature is conducive to conservatism. The same ground melodies were used by different composers in polyphony for centuries. The same last chord for a work is used for even more hundreds of years. The same relationship of the fourth is used by Stravinski and by the ancient Egyptians. Much of this is due to the laws of sound. We know no music except that bounded by the fourth or fifth, although in the Balinese Islands, there is music using a tempered scale of five notes, which gave Debussy the idea for his whole tone scale.

Over and over, during the last five hundred years, there have been attempts to restore certain of the ancient values. One of these was the restoration of words and meaning. In the early 16th century, there was a particularly fruitful attempt. After five hundred years of polyphony, the many voices of music were cleared away, and just one voice was left (accompanied now by simple chords). This one voice could more clearly and truthfully follow all the beautiful shades of the idea expressed. Like chant, this voice is sensitive to the beauty of Italian sounds. The melodies, while too theatrical for use in the liturgy, are worthy of performance at concerts of sacred music; and they are heroic, making us aware of the great dignity which ancient music can have: because of this they can sharpen our perception of the chant melodies which also have dignity. It is worth while knowing passages from the operas of Caccini, Monteverdi, and the sacred opera of Cavallieri, the dialogue between the soul and the body.

Schütz adapted this method to Latin Church music. His works have the dignity without the theatrical quality, and are of

very great value.

The words and meaning again became closely united in the Greek myth operas of Gluck. This kind of music, though too light and airy for the liturgy, has very noble melodies expressing grief with calmness and serenity. Gregorian chant has this same serenity. Gluck's melodies may be easily sung by children or amateurs.

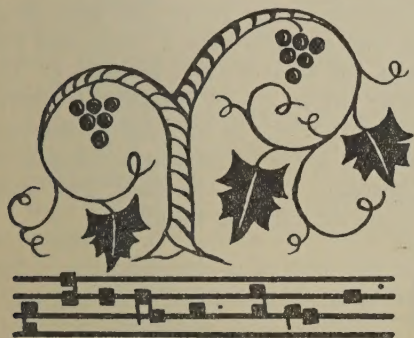
Yet another fruitful way of achieving ethos involved the use of symbolism in music. In the early 17th century, almost everything was written according to the doctrine of *Affektenlehre*,⁴ achieving great power in the sacred works of Johann Sebastian Bach. Knowledge of the works of Bach is indispensable for choir singers, should be kept constantly in rehearsal, and should be included in school music curricula. Reviewing the great masters reveals elements that sharpen perception for Gregorian chant and for ethos in music. In teaching Gregorian chant, it is important to relate it to the works of Bach, Schutz, Monteverdi, Gluck, Haydn, Schubert, the Italian and English madrigals, as well as the rich variety of folk music.

The second important help for hearing music is ear training. Plain exercises to develop the capacity to hear distinctly high and low sounds, longer and shorter sounds, long and short pauses are essential to this.

For instance, if someone says "yellow" or "white", what mental image do you form in your mind? Now if someone says "G" or "D" (not meaning the letter but the sound) what mental image can people form in their minds? Yet the vocabulary of all music consists of A B C D E F G, each with one sharp and one flat, no more, but these few must be heard distinctly. Very few people who have not trained ears can hear more than four or

⁴For an explanation of this term, see Manfred Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era*, pp. 388ff.

five sounds and remember them accurately. Nadia Boulanger, the well known French teacher, after working with many composers and performers finds in this confusion the principal problem in music of today — that all difficulties in composition or performance, when analysed, resolve as a matter of hearing. With



every idea or theory about music it is necessary to hear inwardly the *sound* it describes easily. This is necessary to acquire freedom of composition or performance.

This confusion has not always existed. In many recent school systems in Europe, ear training has been a part of every grade school and high school curriculum. Ear training was not thought of as only for musicians, any more than written compositions are thought of as only for professional writers. This has been true in recent school systems as well as in ancient and medieval ones. Here is a quotation from Aristotle:

Music has the power of producing a certain effect on the moral character of the soul, and if it has the power to do this, it is clear that the young must be directed to music and must be educated in it.

We ought now to decide whether the young should learn music by singing and playing themselves or not It is impossible or difficult to become a good judge of performances if one has not taken part in them Such consideration therefore proves that children should be trained in music so as actually to take part in its performance.

Politics 5.

(In those days, performance involved

singing, which automatically involved some ear training — quite extensive ear training if the more complicated modes were sung.)

We have testimony from the ancients derived from the courses of education which they founded (in music).

Politics 3

This is from Aristoxenos:

For the student of musical science, accuracy of sense perception is a fundamental requirement. For if his sense perception is deficient, it is impossible for him to deal successfully with those questions that lie outside the sphere of sense perception.

Harmonic Elements,
transl. Macran, p. 189.

Odo of Cluny had this to say in the 10th century:

You have insistently requested, beloved brothers, that I should communicate to you a few rules concerning music, these to be . . . of a sort which boys and simple persons may understand. Indeed . . . with God's help alone, I taught certain actual boys . . . by means of this art so that some after three days, others after four days, one after a week were able to learn several antiphons . . . to sing them without hesitation, not hearing them sung by anyone, but contenting themselves . . . with a written copy.

As the teacher first shows you all the letters (of the alphabet) in a table, so the musician introduces all the sounds of a melody on the monochord.

Enchiridion musices from *Source Readings in Music History*,
ed. O. Strunk, pp. 103-105.

Blessed Hermann Contractus, in the 11th century, wrote:

He sings in vain whose mind does not blend with his voice But how do those persons sing wisely who know nothing of what is mentioned above (the system of Church modes) who confuse things by interchanging mode for mode, who praise only the high note? In this respect they should rightly be considered worse and more ignorant than the ass . . . O sad misery of men! Certainly no one in grammar . . . allows an error, but in music . . . almost everyone fails to correct errors and even defends them.

These quotations show that in many periods it was either urged or taken for granted that the ordinary person who goes to school should learn the elementary sounds. In some ages, people picked up this knowledge quickly and easily during childhood, just as children pick up one and sometimes more than one language without much difficulty. For instance, when Johann Sebastian Bach graduated from the Gymnasium, in addition to mastering his other studies, he could play the organ, harpsichord, and violin. He could also improvise on these instruments, and could write music in the style of five or six different contemporary com-

posers. One might at first think that all of this was due to the genius of Bach, but it was not unusual for a boy still in school to be able to do most of this; familiar as he would be with the music of these musical times, as even the elementary studies there were, were effective, facilitating such ability.

Everyone would admit that there is no such ease in performance today, and that this is due to confusion in hearing. The remedy advanced by Blessed Hermann Contractus which holds true in the confusion of today — to attain freedom in performance, learn to hear the notes through accurate ear training.

NOTES

CONGRATULATIONS are in order for Sister Esther, S.P., who was cited by Sister Madeleva, President of St. Mary's College, South Bend, Indiana, to receive an honorary degree at that institution on May 27. Sister Esther was chosen to be presented with a doctor's degree, *honoris causa*, because of her "close, persevering and splendid identification with Christian art."

Foundress of the Catholic Art Association and first editor of the *Quarterly*, Sister Esther is currently head of the Art Department of St. Mary-of-the-Woods College. She has been associated with the Art Workshops at Catholic University, as director or staff member, since their beginning in 1952. Recently, Sister Esther was honored by being chosen as Consultor in Art for the board of the Sister Formation Conference Curriculum Workshop, and will serve in this capacity in July.

THE 1956 NATIONAL CONVENTION of the Catholic Art Association will be held at Immaculate Heart College, Los Angeles, on the week-end after Thanksgiving. The theme and convention program have not yet been announced, but a large attendance is expected because of the infrequency of

conventions held on the West Coast. Announcements of program and plans will be sent to the members from the C.A.A. president and from Sister Magdalen Mary of Immaculate Heart.

A REMINDER: A Workshop on Art will be held at Catholic University from June 15 to June 26. It is planned to be a help to all teachers to intensify their understanding of the visual arts as a language, and to this end, professional artists and teachers of art will offer slide lectures, gallery tours, exhibitions of student work, demonstrations of techniques, and provide direct experiences with materials. Complete information and application blank may be had by writing to: Director of Workshops, Catholic University, Washington 17, D.C.

OFFICERS OF THE C.A.A. will convene at Catholic University, Washington, D.C., Saturday, June 23, at 4:30 p.m. Among the topics on the agenda are problems of promotion and regional reorganization. All officers are urged to be present and all interested members are invited to attend.

JOHN HOWARD BENSON

MAN OF LETTERS

1901-1956

We have called our partner John Benson a man of letters, but not in the usual sense. He was not a literary man. His dominating interest was not in words but in the letters themselves in which words are written. It is in the literal sense that he was a man of letters, and if we are to try to assess the cultural value of his lifelong effort, it must be with this central and absorbing interest in mind. He saw letters as things whose primary purpose was to be read, and which must therefore be legible. He saw them as things to be made, and therefore their making as a process of art and subject to its laws. He recognized that this making must raise moral and technical as well as formal problems. He saw them in their historical setting — subject to the flow of time as well as the laws of space. And he saw the close relationship between the expression of ideas in language and the literal forms in which language is recorded.

He was fond of distinguishing between the causes of a thing that remain in it when it is completed — its pattern and its material — and those that do not — the means by which and the ends for which it was made. A thing exists as a combination of matter and form, and each of these can be studied and learned from, but the means and the end of its existence can be learned about only in other ways. And so it must be now with John Benson's works. They are here for us to study — shaped stones, written and carved letters, silver medals, printed books — both as pieces of material informed with an idea, and as ideas embodied in various pieces of material. His artistic output was voluminous, and it remains. But his own character and abilities, the means by which his works came to be what they are, and the convictions

which drove him to lead the kind of life he led and make the kind of things he made — these exist now only in the memories of the people who knew and worked with him. So, as his colleagues, it seems to us fitting to give some account of what he called the "extrinsic causes" of his work, as far as a short notice permits.

As a child he was taken every Memorial Day to the Common Burying Ground of his native Newport, Rhode Island, and there he wondered, as a child wonders, at the beauty and seemliness of the old slate headstones, and at the contrast between this loveliness and the vulgarity which in that day was taking its place. By his own account, it was from this early admiration that his mature love of lettering, and interest in all its problems, grew. There, where his forebears lay buried in unostentatious graves, he first saw how lovely simple letters and ornament could be, cut with chisels on common stones by unlearned men who were brick masons and foundation layers as well as carvers. Gradually he began to wonder why what had been done once could not, in some sort, be done again.

As he grew older he was more and more impressed with the real values of the type of social structure that was characteristic of colonial Newport. He became less and less able to take seriously the faith of those around him in the infinite perfectability of a materialistic evolution. He went to art school in New York, helping to finance himself by doing artistic hack work, which included layouts of stone inscriptions for architects. A friend gave him a copy of Edward Johnston's *Writing, Illuminating and Lettering* which he read and reread. It occurred to him that he could design letters

better if he knew how to cut them in stone, and one summer in Newport, from two old stone cutters — German and English — he learned what they could teach him of this ancient craft. When opportunity offered him the chance of buying what was left of the once thriving John Stevens Shop, he eagerly collected what money he could, despite the dismal warnings of relatives and friends. Thus at the age of twenty-five he found himself the owner of a lettering and stone carving business which had been in almost continuous operation for two centuries and a quarter. He had a copy of Johnston, an intense interest in letters, and very little else.

For the next thirty years — his working life time — he identified himself with the John Stevens Shop. He taught Art at Portsmouth Priory School, and Lettering, Sculpture, and the Philosophy of Design at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence. But teaching was never his main interest or work. Neither were the forgotten techniques he revived in making coins and medals, nor his lectures, broadcasts, and published books.* First and foremost he was the carver of letters in stone — slate, marble, and granite; the Shop was the center of his working life, and everything of importance to him revolved about that center. What is perhaps the oldest business enterprise in the United States he just saved at the moment of its threatened collapse. Under his management it prospered, and after his death it continues.

The success of the Shop as a business is still grounded on the fact that it does not supply art objects as ordinarily understood, but tombstones and wall tablets which their buyers would get whether perfectly made or not. The Shop thus exemplifies Lethaby's famous definition of art as "the well making of what needs making." In

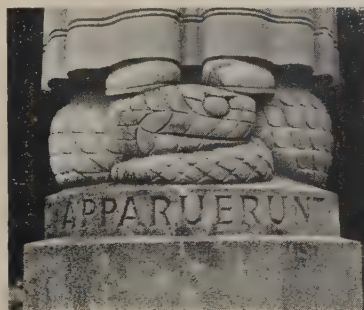
the Shop things are made beautifully which people actually want for other reasons than their beauty. Few studios in the "art world" enjoy this economic stability. If John Benson carved but a handful of statues in the round it is because, as many a studio sculptor will ruefully tell you, the buying public, exclusive of the Government, is not much interested in statues. But there is a vast public who buy gravestones, and a small percentage of these want them decently laid out and cut. The economic success of the Shop has reposed on this principle.

John Benson's use of simple tools and appliances has sometimes been misunderstood as a sort of romantic medievalism. But his tools were no more an affectation than the fact that he wore a long apron and a beard. The apron he wore because it kept his clothes clean, and the beard because it was convenient and becoming. At the beginning of his career as a letter cutter he found out why pneumatic chisels were not for him. They cut faster than he could think. No experiment was needed to find out why he did not want to use stencils and the sand blast. Later on he learned the guiding principle behind the excellence of direct tools, and it is this. A perfect artifact is the result of a perfect image perfectly imposed on material. If between the craftsman's mind and his work comes an instrument difficult to control, then the image will be imperfectly materialized. The most controllable tool, in any given art, best insures perfection in the product. All great craftsmanship ultimately depends upon the simple tool in the skilled hand of the imaginative designer. Hence, instead of tracing elaborate paper details, he relied simply on a brush in his skilled hand to lay out inscriptions directly on the stone. He cut the letters so laid out with plain chisels rather than by any means less flexible. He generally wrote with phragmites reeds and swans' quills in preference to commercial steel pens, because in the hand of a callig-

**The Elements of Lettering*, J. H. Benson & A. G. Carey, McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc. *The First Writing Book*, J. H. Benson, The Yale University Press.



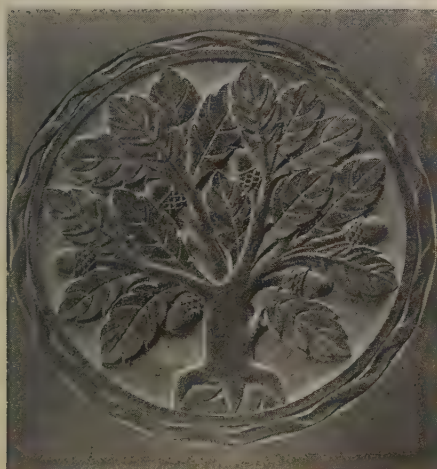
Imperial Danby marble ledger stone.
The ornament is a stone adaptation
of the unilinear pen ornament
developed in the 17th and 18th centuries.



Indiana limestone figure,
done for Daniel Sargent,
on bank of Charles River,
South Natick, Mass.
8 feet tall.

LEFT: Details.

WORK OF JOHN HOWARD BENSON

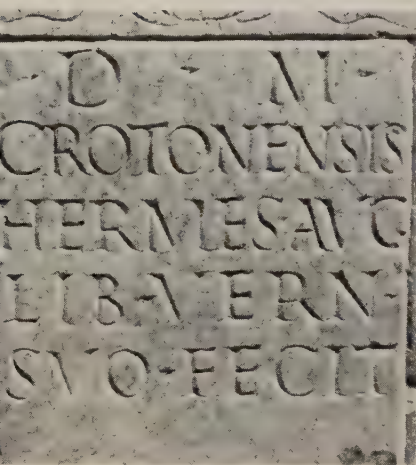
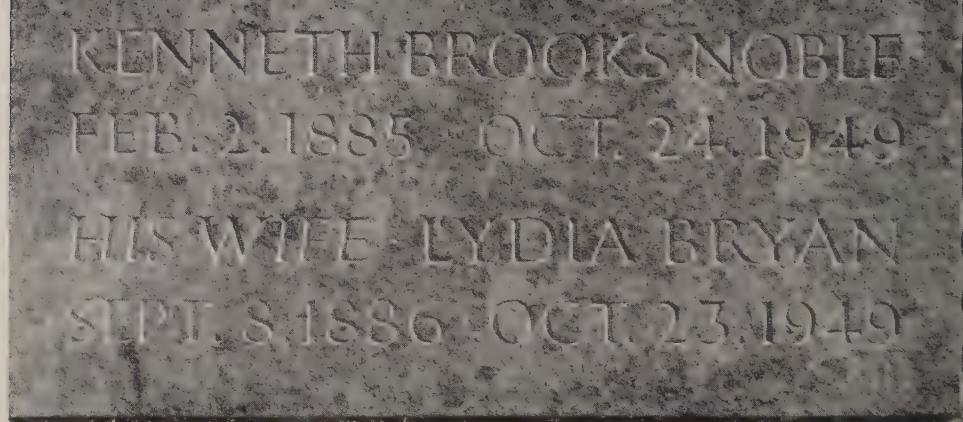


Detail
from a Monson, Maine,
slate stone.

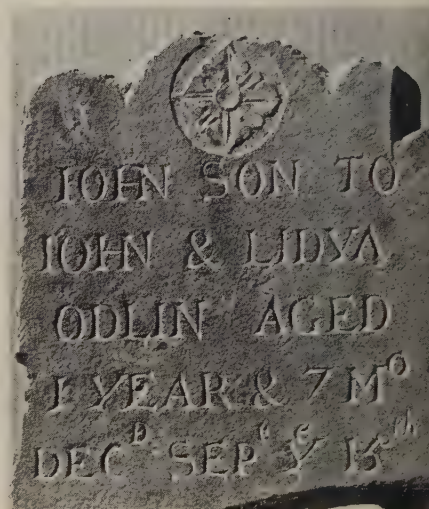


Imperial Danby marble,
central monument for a family lot.

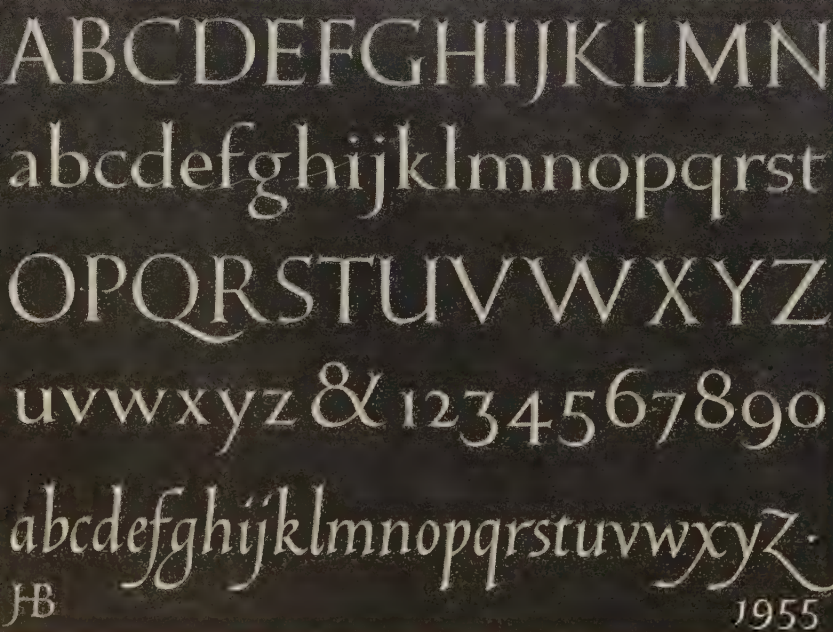
Granite
ledger stone.
Yellow-gray
Westerly granite,
natural seam face.



Roman grave stone
cut about 50 A.D.
The traditional relation of
the letter forms of
this to the John Son stone
(RIGHT), and to Noble stone
(ABOVE), different as they are
in so many ways, is very
striking.



ABOVE: This stone
cut about 1690, shows the
strength of tradition in
letter forms, over a period
of sixteen hundred forty years.



Black Monson, Maine, slate
oiled to protect it
from fingermarks and to
emphasize its blackness.
Letters gilded.

1955

rapher they are finer writing instruments. Lastly, he was a convinced and painstaking perfectionist. He held that bad workmanship does not produce works of art.

John Howard Benson greatly strengthened the existing calligraphic traditions, both in carved and in written letters. He helped to revive some dying traditions, as in the case of die-sinking. He saved and kept in continuous production a stone carving shop which was founded seventy years

before the American Revolution. He supplied hundreds of patrons with beautifully carved or written inscriptions which they could otherwise never have bought. And in so doing he gave encouragement to those who need to be helped to believe that such achievements are possible.

Adé de Bethune
Roxanne Price Carey
Graham Carey

BOOK REVIEW

CAREY, GRAHAM

Tails Book

New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1956.
132 pp., illustrated by Francis Dahl, \$2.50.

Whereas wings have always enjoyed immense prestige, tails have generally suffered from undeserved contumely. Peer Gynt's horrified reaction to the Troll King's insistence that he acquire one, is an excellent example of the average human dismay at Darwin's odious assumptions — now gloriously proven as idiotic scientifically as they were unacceptable theologically. Mr. Graham Carey has restored to the tail its proper place, and to his readers their proper perspective: and has given admirable Thomistic reasons for his every statement. His children's book — which is perfect for small fry while also most edifying for their elders — shows tails to be one of Nature's most versatile means for providing irrational animals with what they need. He has filled his little book full of informative facts, to which Francis Dahl has added enchanting pictures.

Mr. Carey starts out with a chunk of St. Thomas himself, when he announces that he intends to describe "some of the different kinds of things that Irrational Animals do by the use of their Tails, and Tailless Rational Animals do by the use of their heads." And the very best part of his book is that everything in it is true.

The much despised early Victorians used to refer all natural phenomena to the Providence of God, which they loved to show at work in the "economy of Nature." Mr. Carey has transformed this old-fashioned expression of Protestant piety (so well exemplified in such books as *The Nursery Library*, *The Fairchild Family*, or the works of Miss Maria Edgeworth) into sound Christian doctrine, illustrated by imaginative and charming examples. Every child, as each adult reader of Mr. Carey's modern bestiary will have his or her preferences among the thirty creatures whose significant tails are catalogued — my own favorites are the opossum, the bat, and the python. The latter's description is prefaced by wise remarks about most people not liking snakes, though "of course they are not bad in themselves, but only bad from our point of view if we happen to get too much mixed up with them. If they follow their snake-nature (as they do) they are good really. If we follow our human nature (which we usually don't) we are good."

This wise and witty book is a compendium of Christian humanism, being besides beautifully written and produced—initials, type and design are all satisfactory. This is a must for every contemporary Johnny, whether he can or can't read — and for his parents.

Anne Freemantle

THE CHASUBLE - - AGAIN

Father Phelan's article on the chasuble in the Christmas, 1955, issue of the C.A.Q., and the photographs with which it was illustrated, have aroused some unfavourable as well as favourable comment among our readers. It seems almost impossible to deal with the points raised without appealing to certain simple philosophic principles. For there is a philosophy of dress, or an application to dress of the more general philosophy of art. To what extent can this question of the shape of the chasuble be enlightened by an appeal to such orderly thinking?

By Graham Carey

There are many kinds of trousers in the world that are seemly and well designed, but the type that is most characteristic of American middle class life has in it some basic faults, and one of these I would like to analyze for the purpose of introducing the reader quickly to the philosophy of dress. What makes ugly trousers ugly? It seems simplest to say that their formal and final causes are in conflict rather than in harmony with one another. That is, the image in the mind of the designer is in some way contradictory to the use for which the trousers are designed.

What is this image and what is this use? The use is obviously a covering for legs, and legs are vertical columns jointed at hips and knees. The free functioning of legs means the free bending of these joints. The formal image of the fashion designer and his tailor is that of two cylinders, joined together at the top, into each of which is pressed a pair of unbroken vertical creases.

Now there are two sets of conditions in which the inner discordance in the design of trousers is not obvious; in one of these the formal element dominates the functional — in the other the functional dominates the formal. On formal and ritual occasions, when no free use of hips and knees is required, trousers may have a stateliness and even a kind of beauty. The cylinders are felt to be cylinders and the vertical creases are unbroken by horizontal

ones. Or on the other hand, when all thought of dignity is abandoned, and the wearer works and even kneels in his trousers, allowing them to develop the type of creases natural to the casings of articulated legs — creases which on the whole are horizontal — then again the trousers may show a certain kind of beauty. But between these extremes we find an imperfection which can be understood by the discursive intellect to be the result of a conflict between formal and final causes, and can be judged by the intuitive intellect in terms of beauty and ugliness.

A woman's skirt may illustrate further points in the philosophy of dress. Here, happily, we can take a more positive line of argument, emphasizing seemliness rather than its opposite. Here also the importance of material will enter the picture, and in addition we must make some reference to the tendency of the creative imagination to "formalize" or mathematicize its products.

It has long been observed that the normally working creative imagination tends to see its objects in terms of simple mathematical relationships, or rather in terms of relationships which may be given mathematical interpretations. Musical harmonies, color harmonies, and linear and spatial harmonies all have obvious mathematical counterparts. And not only does the artist instinctively see solutions to his problems in this "formal" way, but the sensitive appreciator of the artist's work, in becoming aware of its "formal aspects,"

sharpens his appreciation of its excellence. In a three dimensional art such as that of clothing bodies, the "formal shapes" will tend to be simple geometrical solids — cylinders, cones, hemispheres, and so forth. As the creative mind delights in such geometric forms, so the perceptive mind delights in recognizing them. And the more adapted the material used is to the display of the geometric form, the more easily will it be recognized.

A skirt covers about the same part of a woman's body as trousers do a man's. The normal body to be covered has a narrow waist, broad hips, and legs capable of a wide stride, hinged from these hips. The most obvious geometric shape for the fulfilling of this functional need is the truncated cone.* The flare from the waist to a diameter at the hem that allows a full stride makes this shape in a manner archetypal. But to appear at its best, to appear to be what it indeed is, the conical skirt must be of a sufficiently heavy and stiff material to suggest its basic geometric pattern. It must be intuitively recognizable as a cone even though not at any particular moment in a strictly conical shape. Too soft and flexible a material causes the mind to lose track of the skirt's essential form. Too hard and stiff a material (as with the contemporary "crinolines") weakens the appreciation of the skirt as a practical, functional garment.

The most beautiful skirts are usually full and of a fairly heavy kind of cloth. This balance between form and matter, pattern and what is patterned, is a nice one, and all too easily upset when the exigencies of commerce call for novelty rather than for maximum beauty.

Let us imagine for a moment a hypothetical case which may never have actually

*The hemisphere is another but is less practical for any but rather ritual occasions. A considerable part of the humor of Punch in the earlier Victorian period was based on the unsuitability of the crinoline for the use of elderly charwomen.

occurred, but might have done so. We will picture a society in which trousers were the garment of ceremony and dignity. The stately movements of ritual occasions were perfectly suited to this form of dress and in the early days of the culture they were eminently beautiful and appropriate. But



as time went on a tendency developed to dignify the trousers still further by embellishments and enrichments of all kinds. They were cut from stiff brocades, encrusted with pearls and other gems, embroidered heraldically in silks and gold threads. As a result of these well intentioned additions even the deliberate motions of ritual became difficult and painful, and in due course a dress reform was called for. As the dignitaries could no longer bend their knees the trousers were cut off short, and the garments were widened at the hips to facilitate the moving of those joints. This reform eased the bodily suffering of the priesthood, but destroyed the dignity of their priestly accoutrements. An ill-judged attempt to dignify, followed by an ill-judged attempt at reform together ended in the destruction of dignity.

We come at last to the point of all these observations. The examples of the ugly trousers and the beautiful skirt and the fable of the bejewelled trousers are given to prepare the way for an oversimplified account of what really did happen in the history of the Christian chasuble. The sacrificial garment of the priest was selected from existing Roman types to express the nobility and dignity of the sacrifice, and to express the priest's total dedication to it. The form chosen was a truncated cone which covered the celebrant's body from

nape to heels as if it were a little house, as its name *casula*, "little house," from whence we get "chasuble," suggests. Except for his head the *casula* cuts the priest off completely from his surroundings, and in order to use his hands he must lift the front part over his arms where it rests in more or less horizontal folds. As in the case of the skirt, the material must be heavy enough to allow the simple conical shape, in relation to the body beneath it, to express its natural and formal beauty. Too thin or too soft a cloth destroys the impressiveness of the cone. And a stuff too stiff or heavy is unsatisfactory from the functional point of view, as the priest can then only raise his hands with difficulty and fatigue. In the perfection of this garment discursive reason sees a nice balance between the exigencies of formal, final, and material causes. Aesthetic intuition sees it as seamliness and beauty. History bears witness that this shape remained almost unchanged for close upon a millennium. As in the often cited cases of the blacksmith's anvil and the post-Stradivarian violin, it would seem that here we have an artificial shape so perfectly balanced as to resist change.

And yet it did not resist change. In the later Middle Ages a desire for material magnificence overwhelmed an earlier appreciation of purity of form. The stuff of the chasuble was stiffened and weighed down with brocades, embroideries, and gems. This extra burden made it impossible, or at least very difficult, for the priest to use his hands in the prescribed manner. A first false step had been taken: a choice of a material unsuited to the function of the garment. An enlightened conservatism could have corrected this error at once by a return to material of a suitable weight, but instead a second false step was taken. The overweighted material was kept but the conical form was sacrificed. To make it possible for the celebrant to raise his

arms, the cloth at the priest's sides was progressively shortened until the cutting away reached his shoulders. His arms were now entirely free, but the beauty of the cone, and the idea of the "little house," had disappeared. In place of the sacrificial garment there had appeared something very like a herald's tabard.

This form, today officially approved under the name of the Roman chasuble, popularly known as the "fiddleback," is a *casula* only in name. It is the result of two historical missteps taken in a period more noteworthy for artistic exuberance than for artistic logic. But again, instead of a return to the norm a further step in the wrong direction was taken. The lack of sacerdotal dignity and the aesthetic poverty of the tabard caused a desire for greater fullness. A modification of the tabard came into unofficial use which, while still essentially a tabard, was so amplified as to hang in generous folds. These folds however, are vertical and not more or less horizontal like those of the arm-uplifted cone. There is indeed an amplitude suggestive of ceremonial robes, but in these "Gallican" and "Spanish" forms there is neither the classical beauty of the cone nor the meaning of the *casula*.

Oversimplified as this account of the history of the chasuble is, I do not believe that it is false. The details of change that I have omitted do not seem to me essential to the main story. I have intended to include only as much historical detail as is necessary to an understanding of the philosophical implications of the change which the last five or six centuries have witnessed. Both the aesthetic evidence and discursive analysis seem to point to an early return to the original classical norm. At present we must accept the legislature of the Church in this matter, but we hope that before long the use of the conical chasuble will be not only permitted but encouraged.

THE WINDSOR CHAIR

By Thomas W. Phelan

The modern American, emerging from a century of the exuberant curvaceousness of Victorian plush, the stately but ugly squareness of "General Grant Gothic," and the nondescript formlessness of early 20th century over-stuffness and squattiness, has come to cast an admiring eye on the household furniture of his Early American progenitors and, in fact, to take inspiration from these venerable pieces in his approaches to modern design. The last twenty-five years or more has witnessed a birth of interest and awe, scholarly investigation and popular writing, collecting and mass reproduction of Early American furniture.

Why this interest and awe and investigation and writing and collecting and reproduction? It seems that, as in many other things, we have come to recognize the honesty and goodness of design, construction, and decoration, and the consequent beauty of this most noble period of American furniture history. That Early American furniture is honest and good and beautiful, generally speaking, will hardly be disputed. The facts that it has so long held up in use, and that it is still so pleasing to the eye and satisfactory to the intellect, bear this assumption good witness.

The early American, a child of hard labor in the face of new discovery, had little time to spend on anything but the useful. His furniture had to fulfill a need in the best possible way. But, because his uses of leisure were also necessarily confined by his circumstances, he wanted to surround himself with useful things that were also sightly things so that his moments of leisure might be supported by the beauty of the things about him. The Windsor chair, as all his household furniture, is an obvious materialization of this

desire to combine both usefulness and beauty in his designing and making.

Let us take an example which will serve the double purpose of introducing us to the Windsor chair and showing the combination of usefulness and beauty in this chair. The example we mention here is the so-called comb-back Windsor armchair (see page 102). This is the most stately and most comfortable of all Windsors, a tall chair with high round back surmounted by a well-shaped and carved comb, arm rest, well-fitted seat and strong, shapely base. It was conceived as a light but sturdy chair for the head of the house for use before a broad fireplace on a winter's evening. The high back and arms and thick, deep shaped, broad seat supported by splayed legs strengthened by an H stretcher provided not only proper support, position and comfort for the master of the house, but also the high strong back provided a rack over which a quilt or shawl could be thrown to protect the sitter from the winter drafts. Besides this unusual usefulness, a finely shaped comb with spirally scrolled ends supported by long, fine, tapering spindles, knuckle carved arm-ends supported by turned uprights, a deep shaped saddle seat and bulbous turned, splayed legs give to this chair great beauty.

The Windsor chair is, like most Early American pieces, of English origin. But, also like most Early American pieces, it has been given a peculiarly American simplicity and gracefulness by the colonial craftsman. It arrived in America around the end of the first quarter of the 18th century. At the start, the handsome American versions were called Philadelphia chairs after the city where they were first made. Within a scant twenty-five years, however, their manufacture spread northward to New England. For nearly a cen-

WINDSOR CHAIRS



*Bow-back Windsor armchair
designed by Thomas Phelan
and currently owned by
Franklin Seaton.*



*Braced-back Windsor side chair
designed by Franklin Seaton
and currently owned by
Grant Thompson, Troy, N. Y.*



*Bow-back Windsor armchair
designed by Thomas Phelan
and currently owned by
Thomas Phelan.*

tury and a half they were made in various types throughout the colonies and, later, the States. Since the middle of the 19th century they have appeared at intervals in corrupted forms, though today they are being reproduced in great quantity in forms *looking like* the earliest and finest types.

The Windsor chair was really the first "factory-made" piece of furniture in America. There were wood turners in at least five colonies who made no other furniture and styled themselves "Windsor chair makers." This fact made them available, and their availableness, added to their usefulness and beauty, is unquestionably the reason why, from the earliest period of Windsor manufacture, they were accepted as the common chair, what we today would refer to as the "kitchen" chair, though they had a place in almost every room except the parlors of the finest mansions.

With this introduction, it is well to get on to their making. The Windsor chair is a light chair, though it is sturdier than any other chair ever made in America. It is never fragile or clumsy. This is, in part, the result of careful and proper use of a combination of woods. The plank seat is always made of a light, soft wood: pine, whitewood or basswood. A light, soft wood is used both because the seat calls for the only thick (usually about 2 inches), large (up to 24 inches by 24 inches) surface of wood and a hard wood would add so much to the over-all weight of the chair, and because these light, soft woods are easily scooped out for the deep shaping of the seat to fit bodily contours — which makes of the Windsor chair the most comfortable plank bottom chair ever made.

For the base, hard woods are used: maple, yellow birch or beech turned to the vase or cylinder and blunt-arrow or vase-and-ring or, in later types, to bamboo patterns for the legs, and baluster, bobbin or bamboo patterns for the stretchers. Only hard woods could take the difficult stresses and strains to which the legs and stretchers

of any chair are necessarily put. A tough, flexible, easily bent wood is needed for the spindles, arms, bows, fans, combs, and rods. And so hickory or fine-grained ash and sometimes white oak are used for these parts. These woods make strong, flexible, fine, tapering spindles and are most easily bent for bows, arms, fans, and combs.

Not only are a combination of three varieties of wood used, but a combination of green and seasoned woods are also used, so that the green pieces in drying will shrink around the seasoned pieces, imbedding them in inseparable joints and thus strengthening the chair immensely. The legs are turned of green lumber to dry and shrink around the stretchers of seasoned lumber. The seat is green and dries and shrinks around the legs and back spindles. Green arms and bows and fans and combs and rods dry and shrink around the seasoned spindles.

In the making of the Windsor chair almost every skill that the experienced wood worker has at his command is employed. The Windsor chair maker must turn, bore, dowel, glue, wedge, pin, plane, scoop, rout, chamfer, split, bend, carve, and brace. All parts are put together at different and complementing angles so that the whole may be drawn strongly together.

Legs are joined by an H stretcher which is glued and pinned and sometimes wedged by splitting the dowel at the stretcher ends, inserting a wedge and forcing it home by bringing the base together. Legs are rammed through and wedged into the seat at a splay. The complementary angles of such a base, reinforced by glue and pins and wedges makes the Windsor base the best chair base which has ever been conceived.

The seat is bored around its back for the back spindles which are doweled into it, glued and pinned at angles which provide comfort and strength. These spindles are encased in an arm (on arm chairs) and always terminate in a bow or fan or comb

or rod into which they are doweled and glued and pinned. On some Windsors two spindles brace the top of the back from a projection on the rear of the seat (see photograph of side chair).

The Windsor chair is really a remarkable chair. Not only is it useful, but also beautiful, and its usefulness is assured not only by its design but also by the combination of woods from which it is made, and the use of so many skills in its construction. It is a light chair, though never fragile. It is sturdy, though never clumsy. No better wood chair has ever been made in America.



NOTES

The best book on American Windsor chairs is Wallace Nutting's *A Windsor Handbook* published at Saugus, Massachusetts, by Wallace Nutting, Inc., in 1917. This book is out of print and difficult to purchase, but most good libraries have a copy.

The *Furniture Treasury* by Wallace Nutting (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954) contains more photographs of Windsors than *A Windsor Handbook* and many interesting notes.

Good introductory notes about Windsors and all other Early American furniture can be found in the *Field Guide to Early American Furniture* by Thomas H. Ormsbee (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951).

A WINDSOR CHAIR GLOSSARY

Bow — hoop running about the back and receiving the spindles at their top.

Comb — secondary or higher back on an armchair, named for its resemblance to the old, high comb.

Fan — similar to a comb but on a side chair.

Rod — rod-like top of late type back.

Spiral Scroll — spiral carving of ends of comb.
Knuckle-Carved Arm Ends — shaping of the ends of the arm of an arm chair in imitation of a knuckle.

Uprights — two turned or plain, heavy supports for the arm ends of an armchair.

Plank Bottom — solid wood seat.

Saddle Seat — seat shaped with central high point as a saddle.

Splayed Legs — raked or straddle legs, set in at an angle to the seat.

Bulbous Turned — turned in such a way as to show sharp contrast between large and small sections.

Vase and Blunt Arrow
Cylinder and Blunt Arrow
Vase and Ring
Bamboo } Traditional types of turned legs.

H Stretcher — base stretcher to support legs in form of H.

Baluster
Bobbin
Bamboo } traditional types of turned stretchers.

Turn — to shape while turning in a lathe.

Bore — to drill a hole to receive a dowel.

Dowel — plain turned end of stretcher, leg or spindle to fit into a bored hole.

Wedge — to hold in position in a bored hole by driving a wedge into a split in a dowel.

Glue — to clamp glued parts together until the glue has dried.

Pin — to hold a dowel in place by inserting a pin through it.

Scoop — to gouge, plane or sand out.

Router — to gouge out by use of a router.

Chamfer — to bevel away a corner.

Split — to drive wedges into hard woods to split them down for further working.

Plane — to cut wood down by use of a plane.

Taper — to diminish in size from one end to the other.

Bend — to bend steamed and usually green wood around a frame by clamps where it dries and remains bent.

CONTRIBUTORS

Our cover design, by WILLIAM V. CLADEK, shows the strengthening power of heavenly light.

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SYMPOSIUM ON ART APPRECIATION COURSES IN COLLEGES

Question: I have been asked to teach a course, Art Appreciation, for all non-art students in our college. I took such a course several years ago, but it was merely an affair of memorizing dates and classic examples of various period styles. There must be a better way than that. Will you please suggest what such a course should include and, perhaps, what I can do to prepare myself to teach it?

— S. M. P.

To get a good cross section of current practice, several art teachers in colleges throughout the country were invited to describe the art appreciation course as they teach it. The first four replies describe diversified courses as taught in Catholic colleges for women.

Are we attempting to give a course in Art Appreciation? Let us first take inventory. Has the sense of wonder never been dulled in us? Can we come to the commonplace objects and see in them "things ever new"? Have we acquired the virtue of art so that we habitually see and organize forms that express an ever-growing, new organic reality? Then, onward with the joy of showing others the path! Let us take the students where they themselves "will set fire to the fagots they have brought."

Although very few in a generation become "great" artists, every human being has the potentiality of seeing with the eye of an artist. Each one can be taught to read the language of form and substance; in other words, each one can learn to recognize the *what* and the *how* of art. There is an organic life that gives fundamental reason for forms in nature; so, too, the artist builds an orderly reality, an organic structure, giving form to matter according to a pattern in his own mind. A living work of art moves, having a pent-up energy independent of the subject represented. This is one of the basic concepts to be

grasped. It is important that the teacher has a deep realization of this "imitation," or lyrical transmutation of growth in nature to growth in art. Then we can do much to awaken in the students "that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of their knowledge." (Gibran)

How this understanding of form is taught is a question difficult to answer. A method good in the hands of one might be futile in the hands of another. However, a few leads may be of help. Instead of studying all the principles of art in a matter-of-fact way (although these must be understood), we first look at the commonplace things around us. Let us take a typical example. Looking out of our studio windows, we see houses. At first glance individual houses in various styles meet the eye. After longer study we see a general pattern of shapes. A change occurs in our valuation of the houses. They are no longer detailed roofs, windows, doors, but a rhythm of repeated color patterns. All that is irrelevant to the design has vanished. Our eye reorganizes these shapes into significant forms. Realistic detail is replaced with clearly felt inner relationships. The picture now makes melody in our minds. If we see not the compelling architecture of forms—for it is through these forms that the artist's soul shines—we miss the real content of a work of art. Getting a class to follow one through this mutation from nature to art, providing many

experiences of this kind of seeing with the artist's vision is gradually leading students to form a habit of the mind, or to practice the virtue of art, at least in a very minor degree.

Secondly, a few experimentations with materials such as can easily be provided (bits of string, paste, paper) can introduce the class to the meaning of organization in space. Other problems can be worked out or demonstrated so that students learn to recognize various modes of organization and to see how the artist arrives at convincing characterization of a scene. A suggested problem might be comparative analyses of works with and those without form, especially where these treat the same theme.

Thirdly, in studying works of art of the past and present with a class, a teacher should realize that thorough understanding of *one* very great work of art is better than mere acquaintance with the masters and their repertoires through small and cheap prints or photographs. We consider it better to *know* a work of art than to know *about* it. Conducted tours to galleries and to the exhibits held at college are a necessity. The best in the line of films and slides is also a must toward successful teaching of a course in appreciation.

The shortest cut to an understanding of media and materials is to have our appreciation classes visit our art classes at work in painting, sculpture, silversmithing, ceramics, silk-screening, etc. In schools where these workshops are not conducted, visits to artists in the vicinity would be advisable.

Every teacher's own ingenuity will prompt many procedures toward an art-seeing readiness. But this will be at least a beginning, for America needs a spiritually alert and discriminating youth if the arts are to find a real "form expression" of our Catholic culture.

*Sister M. Helena, O.S.F.
Alverno College
Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

Jacques Maritain makes an interesting observation in one of his works when he writes, "Though in themselves of no help to the attainment of eternal life, art and poetry are more necessary than bread to the human race. They fit it for the life of the spirit." The statement bears strongly on the subject of this paper: the feasibility of offering a course in art appreciation to all non-art students in college. Such a course should not only provide an interesting experience but it is essential for a well rounded education which will fit students for "the life of the spirit."

A consideration of the purpose of education makes the need of such a course obvious. Today distance matters little; travel has become a popular avocation. As a result, students have greater opportunities than before to observe and to contemplate the masterpieces of art of all centuries, be they architecture, painting, or sculpture. Any short visit to Europe will reveal the great wealth of ages and will stimulate the intellectual curiosity even of an average student.

Because only a limited time — usually one semester or at most two semesters — is set aside for this course, the subject matter must be carefully selected. The instructor must plan wisely and budget the time so each of the major periods in the history of art may be studied and a fair cross section of the accomplishments of the ages be given. Since the nature of the course is extensive rather than intensive, only major artists and movements of each period should be studied; the outstanding characteristics of each observed, compared, contrasted, classified, and evaluated. In teaching this course, visual aids are indispensable since the lectures should be accompanied by slides. The use of two projectors is highly recommended, for only then can the instructor point out to the group the similarities and contrasts between

any two periods, two artists, or two works. An ample supply of reproductions or prints of the examples studied in class—either posted on the bulletin boards or placed on tables easily accessible to the student—produces remarkable results. If a department is not equipped with transparencies necessary for slide projection, an opaque projector serves as well; reproductions found in books or on separate leaves, both in color and black and white, are suitable. *University Prints* available in 5" by 8" are good and can be used for both class discussion and study purposes. Although many examples can be shown in class, the number of prints and reproductions for study should be limited.

Despite the fact that this is a course in appreciation, there is really no escape from studying *some* dates, styles, and trends. It is important that the affective response be justified by judgment based on every possible item of relevant knowledge. The understanding of the major characteristics of the movements in the history of architecture, sculpture, and painting will enable a student to identify a particular work as a product of its epoch without making it necessary to commit to memory too many specific dates.

It is hardly necessary to mention the fact that the preparation of the instructor for this course must be very broad. He must have a rich background in the history of art. As it is with courses in other fields so it is with art appreciation: there is no one text which is entirely satisfactory. Advisable as it is to have a text, it must be supplemented by other readings. Here at Madonna college, a syllabus in which there is a brief systematic outline of the course material, a tentative time table, a bibliography of related readings is given to each student and it contributes much to the effective teaching of the course.

*Sister M. Angelina, C.S.S.F.
Madonna College
Livonia, Michigan*

Any class in which the memory is used instead of the intellect is always boring at the time and subsequently useless because the memory fails us easily. Many teachers have based their success in teaching on steering a course they would have wished to follow as a student. Give your students what you wanted yourself, and they will enjoy and profit by the instruction.

Personally, I have no aptitude for memorization and find the logical approach one which is workable. Although the order may seem in reverse, students will have a greater appreciation of the history of art if they can understand the need for art in their own lives. So, start with the ego. Ask them at the beginning of the course such questions as: "What part has art played in your life thus far? What part do you think it will play in the future? What do you expect to get from this course?" The answers to these questions may very well outline your procedure for the year. You will find that even in college the majority of "non-art" students have a very poor background which needs enrichment.

My own experience on the college level, limited though it is, has proved to me that college students need the same enrichment as high school students with whom I have had eleven years' experience.

One way of stimulating interest is to let the students participate in creative activities, such as arranging flowers. They learn a great deal about design from evaluation and criticism. Another way is to present a problem for solution, e.g., the renovation of a small room with a low ceiling to make it appear spacious. Or present an imaginary person their own age who dresses in an unbecoming fashion. This will encourage students to learn the formal elements which constitute good design and the principles which govern the use of these elements of art. Only in this way will they be able to make good choices in furnish-

ings and clothing, regardless of fads. Now they will be eager to see how other civilizations and cultures have solved their artistic problems.

Sir Bannister Fletcher in *A History of Architecture* handles the subject in a manner which proves valid, logical, and interesting in the study of sculpture, painting, or any of the other arts. By examining the geographical, religious, social, and historical influences which brought about a style, the analysis of the style and its identification becomes intelligible.

Another important consideration is the fact that youth likes a challenge. What a difference it would make to such students to realize that they can do much to change standards of taste by improving their own. Recently, in a lecture to our student body, Dr. Eugene Neuhaus said that it is the function of the liberal arts college to educate "art appreciators" more than artists. Make students conscious of their apostolate as Christian women to raise the level of taste not only in matters liturgical, but in every phase of life, since the spirit is ministered to by all that is beautiful.

And don't forget to take students to the local museums—at least for the initial visit. Where there are none to be found, portable exhibits are available as well as magnificent books, films, slides, and opaque projection material. *Life* and *Time* magazines have provided pictures which are invaluable teaching aids. The very materials which will enrich your class will also be your best preparation for vital teaching.

Sister Mary Luke
College of the Holy Names
Oakland, California

4

The course as offered at Marymount is an introduction to the field of art, through the study of painting, architecture, and sculpture.

The primary aim of the course is to develop in the student the ability to

experience works of art directly through pictorial language and to train her to make value judgments by having her realize that the art of any period not only reflects the philosophy of that period, but through its style one may judge the cultures and expressions of an epoch. The method followed is to examine the basic orientations towards life and to show how these are realized in works of art.

The course is liberal in character, the idea being to fill, in some measure, the need that exists for a discussion of the artistic tradition of the past in non-technical terms. We concentrate on the art of the Occident because of the tremendous influence this development has had on our own cultural traditions.

The student must be made aware of the difficulties of prescinding from her contemporary outlook on life. Until she learns to penetrate the past and appreciate the spirit of the times under discussion her understanding of the arts is impeded.

Within these aims, we present basic orientations in the works of art of a single culture, or period, or individual, which seem best to exemplify its essential spirit. For example, Byzantine culture conveys the transcendental spirit, the Periclean Age, Idealism, the art of Van Gogh, Expressionism. In this way, an unwieldy body of historical data is avoided, and yet, at the same time, a certain philosophical continuity is achieved. The desired sequence is attained by taking up these orientations in the order in which they appear in history.

The most troublesome task is to find readings which meet the aims, whether they deal with particular pictorial subject matter or the orientations. As a guide to understanding the past, ideal reading for such a course consists both of texts by artists and critics of art and of parallel writings to reveal the spirit of the age in question. However, these readings have to be assigned to the students and on occasion, we coordinate a group of selections. For

example, the Byzantine material is arranged under the headings: didactic purpose, representation of religious and secular figures, traditional iconography, and the religious preparation of the artist for his profession.

Slides, strip films, and prints are used throughout the course. Supplementing these visual aids, large colored reproductions from the museums are displayed in the adjoining galleries. Weekly assignments are made with reference to the pictures on display. University prints are on file in the Art library for ready reference. Miniature sculpture pieces from the Metropolitan Museum are on exhibition in the gallery's showcases. Since they parallel the periods under discussion, they remain on permanent display throughout the course. These supplementary aids give the student an opportunity to browse at leisure.

Examinations follow the same classroom procedure—a number of slides are projected and students are tested on the growth of their artistic sensitivity rather than on their ability to memorize dates and facts in chronological order.

Marie Gertrude, R.S.H.M.

Marymount College

Tarrytown-on-Hudson, N. Y.

Emphasizing the need for an understanding of the philosophy of art, Father Emeric, O.S.B., and Sister Francis Gabriel, O.P., describe the courses they teach in a college for men and a college for women respectively.

5

A good course in art appreciation for the college student cannot be overemphasized in our day when so much depends on the cultural background of the college graduate. To the novice in the course, the professor must show both the *necessity* and the value of art appreciation not only for the present time and the credits involved, but also the *value* of it in later life. As everyone knows, there are many types of courses

which may be presented, but before a student can even begin to apply himself to any course, I think a basic philosophy is necessary. Therefore, in the course taught at St. Vincent College, we study the terms used in the course, so that there may be some common ground of thought between the student and teacher.

A sound indoctrination in the philosophy of art is basic. This should include a clear understanding of the teachings of Saint Thomas Aquinas as well as his definition of art. Following this beginning, a distinction should be made between *art* and *aesthetics*. This may be concluded with a brief explanation of composition, order, and control, illustrated with prints or slides.

At this time, the role of the creative imagination should be emphasized, as well as the four causes as explained by St. Thomas. As a conclusion to this study, it would be well to explain the difference between imitation and copying. A constant reminder of the importance played by the intellect both in the maker and viewer is a great help to the student.

At this point, it would be logical to consider the nature of beauty, its qualities, the subjective and objective aspects of it, as well as the definitions of St. Thomas, St. Augustine, and Maritain.

Study of the philosophy of art could then be concluded with an explanation of the knowledge required for a just appraisal of a work of art. Since we are by nature intellectuals, all our acts—which include drawing, painting, sculpturing, etc.—must be accompanied by reason and truth. Once the students learn to think correctly along the lines of art, we can proceed in a logical manner to other things. Correct thinking and understanding can ultimately be summed up under *knowledge* and *art*.

After the students have acquired a basic knowledge of the fundamentals of philosophy and art, the next procedure should be in the direction of *structure*. Under this heading might be included such topics as

space, line, proportion, texture, value, the color theories, and unity. By the time they have concluded their study of the elements of structure, they will then be ready to make a survey of the history of art.

A good starting point is primitive art — the early periods and cultures dating back to the neolithic and paleolithic ages. Thus students discover the simplicity of the fundamental elements which constitute good works of art. From here it is wise to proceed to a study of architecture and the fundamental forms.

Then pictorial art should be studied. Using the knowledge acquired at the beginning of the course, students can study on *common ground* the schools and styles of the artists of both the past and the present. At this point in their course, they will have an idea of what constitutes good works of art according to St. Thomas, and they should be able to make just appraisals.

If time permits, it is well to give students an idea of the noteworthy collections of art in this country. A brief survey of the important museums of the world could also be given.

In addition to the lectures and perhaps a good text on art appreciation, the professor and the students should take field trips to important exhibits and museums of art. Such trips are very beneficial and give students a chance to come into direct contact with works of art of past ages.

Father Emeric, O.S.B.

St. Vincent Archabbey

Latrobe, Pennsylvania

6

College: St. Mary of the Springs, Columbus, Ohio.

Course: Art Appreciation, two hours per week for one semester.

Students: For the most part, non-art students.

Aim: To establish some bases whereby the ordinary layman will be able to make an intelligent evaluation of works of art.

Plan:

A. Fundamentals needed by the student are studied in the first part of the semester.

1. In the first period it is interesting to note by discussion what ideas the students have about the meaning of art and even more about a class labeled "art appreciation." Such a discussion leads to the Thomistic definition of art as "the habit by which things are made according to right reason."

a) The exercise of the habit of art encompasses the whole man — his intellect, his will, his imagination, etc.

b) The fine arts may be divided into such classes as: space arts (sculpture, architecture, etc.); time arts (dancing, music, etc.); combination arts (cinema).

c) We study the elements of art: line, color, chiaroscuro, texture, shape (volume, area) and note these in works of art.

d) The principles of design which govern these elements are studied in works of art.

e) We study the difference between art and nature, so often confused by the average person.

B. When these fundamentals have been worked out by discussion and illustration, I proceed to give methods of analysis.

1. The first of these is analyzing a work of art according to the four causes. As a necessary corollary of this we study the Thomistic theory of beauty.

2. We further analyze works of art from the point of view of the elements and principles of art.

3. Using an outline which consists of about ten questions (some of which include ideas similar to

those noted in the preceding two points) we study works of art. The important questions in this series are:

What was the artist trying to do?

Was the problem worth doing?

How well did he succeed in doing it?

C. We make a survey from a historical point of view of some of the major art epochs, using outstanding examples from those periods. In this study we apply our different methods of analysis.

1. We study the tomb architecture and sculpture of Egypt; the temples and sculpture of Greece; the Roman contributions of practicality; the Gothic cathedral of medieval Europe; the spirit of the Italian Renaissance and its concomitant forms of art.

2. We contrast such works of art as Angelico's "Annunciation" vs. El Greco's; the work of the 17th century Dutchmen vs. the Venetians of the same period.

3. We summarize this historical survey by investigating the three-period hypothesis or the cyclic theory of art showing that the forms of art of a given civilization evolve through a series of cycles from the primitive's struggle to master technique to a decline when the ultra-developed technique has become a hindrance.

4. Because "modern" art is so often condemned without reason we spend some time studying the different "isms" of our times beginning with Impressionism. We try to acquire a basis for judging "modern" works fairly and intelligently by studying the works according to the four causes, pointing out especially the aims of each of these "isms."

D. Religious art in our daily living is

given an important place in this course. We study the art of the Church comparing it with the liturgy — or showing that it is part of the liturgy as music is; religious art in the home; symbols as an integral part of religious art expression.

Supplementary to Class Periods:

A. Reading: we use no text but reports or evaluations of books read are handed in. The material assigned enlarges upon class lectures. Among the bibliography are: Faulkner: *Art Today*; Gardner: *Understanding the Arts*; Cory: *The Significance of Beauty in Art and Nature*; Callahan: *A Theory of Esthetic*; Giedion: *Space, Time and Architecture*; Fleming: *Arts and Ideas*; and *Catholic Art Quarterly* — selections.

B. A visit to the community Gallery of Fine Arts is made with a definite assignment to study or analyze a particular work or to note examples from different periods of history.

Sister Francis Gabriel, O.P.

*St. Mary of the Springs College
Columbus, Ohio*

Both a comparatively young college with limited space and supplies, as well as one which is long established and well-equipped challenge the ingenuity of teachers in courses taught by Katharine B. Neilson and Kenneth Gogel.

7

Man and Materials is a combined laboratory and lecture course in art, designed to help each student develop an understanding of man through his use of materials in the graphic and plastic arts. It is a required course, part of the Humanities sequence, and meets for three double periods each week for three quarter hours of credit.

Emphasis is placed upon actual work in

a variety of areas. Each student experiments with as many tools, materials, and processes as time permits. Through these experiences he gains a first-hand knowledge of the elements of design used by the artist in his work.

Through lectures, visual aids, exhibits, reading, and oral and written reports, the student gains an historical background concerning art concepts of the past and present.

Considerable emphasis is placed upon the contemporary arts, the artist's place in society, and the student's relationship to art.

The course is planned to deal with the following major areas: graphics, painting, architecture, ceramics, metalwork, sculpture, and weaving.

No rigid course outline is followed but a set of basic notes has been prepared by the staff to establish some continuity in the classes. A basic text is not required.

Tools and Equipment: each classroom is equipped with two work benches with vises, work tables, material and project storage space, a large display area, and folding chairs for lecture periods.

A series of portable tool sets for sculpturing, metalwork, printing, and ceramics has been constructed to hold basic tools for a group of twenty-four students. The sets are shared by other classes and are therefore scheduled for use several weeks in advance. The sculpture set contains chisels for wood and stone carving, mallets, files, and sharpening stones.

Supplementary tools such as soldering irons, clamps and jewelry tools can be borrowed by the instructor for class use. A ceramic kiln and a portable etching press and enameling kiln are also available.

Materials: each student obtains his own aluminum, copper, salt block, wood for sculpture, crow quill pens, yarn and other materials as needed from local supply sources. The department supplies the paper, clay, tempera paint, and printing ink.

Activities: each instructor determines the number and order of the areas to be covered. Sculpture work may require a few days or several weeks depending on the materials used. An area such as architecture may be dealt with through the use of slides, films, examining models or materials, or by visiting a contemporary home.

Visual Aids: this type of program requires the use of visual aids to supplement the lectures and class work. The following films are especially useful: *Doric to Gothic*, *Matisse*, *Braque*, *Dong Kingman*, *Contemporary Silversmithing*, *Clay Decoration*, *Images Medievaes*, *Rodin*, *Henry Moore*, *Gospel in Stone*, *Art in Our World* and *Lasceaux Cave Painting*. Slides dealing with contemporary materials, modern industrial design, graphic processes, and historical matter are also used.

Exhibits: a monthly exhibit schedule is planned each year to bring original work to the campus. These exhibits are borrowed from the American Federation of Arts, Walker Art Center, Des Moines Art Center, University of Iowa and other sources. One invitational show in a special area is organized by the department each year. The exhibits are supplemented by original paintings, prints, and sculpture owned by the department.

Reading and Written Requirements: classes make extensive use of the art library. Written reports dealing with various areas and a notebook are often required, but since this is basically a laboratory course, it is suggested that this phase of the work be high in quality but limited to a reasonable amount.

Evaluation: the size of the class usually permits individual student-teacher evaluation when the work is completed. The student also gains experience in applying common aesthetic principles in evaluating the work of the whole class.

Kenneth Gogel
Iowa State Teachers College
Cedar Falls, Iowa

It is one thing to envisage a course in art appreciation (for whatever audience) and another to make it a material reality. If one could assume unlimited supplies — lantern slides, books, color reproductions, projectors, display and studio space — one might find it plain sailing. Given a small classroom which was once the master bedroom in an early 20th century private house, immensely crowded conditions, and a wholly non-resident student body, the job is rather different. Slides comes from the collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum, which has added many 2 x 2 inch kodachromes to its original backlog of old fashioned 3¼ x 4 inch black and whites; this means two projectors which must be used interchangeably since there is no room to have both set up at the same time. It takes some ingenuity to plan a class session around slides all of one size, since the collection is incomplete; moreover, the Atheneum lends its slides to other educational institutions within the city and beyond. Try to give a talk on Gothic art when all the views of Chartres, Amiens, and Rheims (including our two color slides of stained glass) have gone out for a week to Trinity College or the University of Connecticut!

Of course, the obvious attitude to take is that of the warrior scenting the smoke of battle: there is a challenge to be met. And before we proceed further, another qualifying condition in the situation must be recognized: the caliber of the students. Hartford College is a two-year institution opened in 1939 as an economy measure for girls whose parents would have difficulty in financing four years of resident college. It is not a Junior College in the ordinary sense; many of its students transfer to four-year colleges such as Mount Holyoke, Smith, Middlebury, and others, while some continue at a local four-year institution such as St. Joseph College in

Hartford. The students vary widely in the quality of their preparation and fitness for college work; one cannot take for granted any uniform minimal equipment in history, languages, literature, or other subjects needed for college work. Many of the girls seem never to have written a term paper or used bibliographical source material.

It has been customary at Hartford College to offer introductory art history and appreciation every other year as an elective, alternating with a course in music. Consequently, no student takes more than one year of art, which may come in the freshman or sophomore year. What had best be done with such a course?

Since there is no resident faculty, all instructors are drawn from local or nearby institutions on a commuting basis; one rarely sees one's colleagues, which means a regrettable loss of interchange of opinion and advice. I was appointed to teach the art course last September, and it is still in an experimental stage. But granted the limitations and uncertainties, and the changes which experience will dictate, this is what I try to do and think should be done elsewhere, allowing for the numberless peculiarities of each individual case.

First, since the students are taking the course as an elective in non-art programs, the emphasis should be, not on styles and techniques as such, but on art as a function and a manifestation of civilization. The familiar Four Causes must be stressed from the outset, with illustrations drawn from the broad general periods of history: the Ancient, the Christian Mediaeval, the Renaissance, and the Modern. There must be some insistence on dates, names, and so forth, or no intelligent discussion can take place, but these should be kept subordinate to the larger issues. Occasional lectures should be given to present general principles, but otherwise the discussion method should be followed, regardless of how much is "covered" in a given semester. That means small classes; my own contains

thirty-six. In a larger institution the classes will be much larger; in that case every effort should be made to arrange weekly meetings of small groups so that discussion may be really fruitful. It is important to get students to see art in terms of their own experience and as an active and continuous force in the life of man through the ages.

I assign papers on actual artifacts in the Wadsworth Atheneum, and others based on reading. There is no substitute for the actual object, and we are fortunate in having a fine general collection at our disposal. The college library is adequate, but it is difficult for non-resident students to use it as residents might; we therefore use a textbook, Helen Gardner's *Art Through The Ages*, which is by no means ideal but the most satisfactory available publication at present. The perfect introductory textbook has yet to be written.

I make as much use as I can of the student's individual interests. Some of them are taking a course in retailing, and can apply their study of art to department store problems. Anyone concentrating in literature, languages, history, or the humanities in general has some equipment into which her art can be fitted, and its importance demonstrated. The average student is sadly lacking in knowledge of classical mythology, the Bible, and literature in general; one does what one can to fill these gaps. Discussion of design as such is more or less incidental in the course I am giving, and there is no "studio" work whatever, but I try to give the girls practice in *seeing* as well as in understanding. They are encouraged to go into buildings as well as to look at them from the outside, thus to "experience" architecture quite consciously; to notice examples of sculpture in local public monuments; to see art, in short, as something outside the museum, which is after all the last place in which an artifact belongs except for safekeeping.

How is one to prepare one's self to teach

a course in art appreciation? There are no short cuts. You ought first to make sure you had the right great-grandfather, by which I mean that your own traditions and training as a human being are what you must start with. Ideally you should have read widely; looked for years at buildings and at portable artifacts and perhaps made some; you should be a philosopher, a mathematician, a poet, and a historian, and you should travel. Having been asked to teach an art appreciation course (where, I assume, no regular art instructor is available) you are probably a teacher of history, literature, or modern languages, and you will naturally have made use of works of art to illustrate the material of your courses. But to present tidy formulas for good design, or to give out lists of artists and artifacts graded A, B and C like market produce or even students, is all wrong and gets nowhere. Too often that sort of thing is nothing more nor less than an arbitrary set of aesthetic standards superimposed on the student for him to memorize with docility or reject (privately, or he'll flunk the course) with indignation or boredom. There are no absolute standards in the field of aesthetic appreciation. Taste will change as sure as human beings grow from youth to old age, and no standard but our own is valid for us. We must teach the hows and the whys; practice looking with our eyes and our minds, to sharpen the perception of both; and never stop studying. We ought also, if we can, to be creating with our hands. Above all, we must take art out of its pretty gift wrappings and recognize it as an integral part of human history and experience. A big job for an elective introductory (or terminal) course? Certainly; so is all teaching. May St. Benedict, St. Luke the patron of artists, and St. Jude the Saint of the Impossible, be with us!

Katharine B. Neilson
Hartford College
Hartford, Connecticut